

Cracking the Code on

Rapidly Growing the SAR Membership Rolls

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Things I've learned after eight years of helping prospective members apply for SAR membership:

1. By far the vast majority of American males do not live near a SAR chapter.
2. Most prospective members have never heard of the SAR.
3. Many SAR chapters are not equipped with at least one member who has the tools or training necessary to help prospective members efficiently complete their applications.

A few years ago, the National Society attempted a recruitment campaign by asking members to send names and addresses of their male kin to Headquarters. Headquarters would then farm out these addresses to volunteers like me to pair these prospective members with a nearby chapter. The chapter would then contact these "prospects." The campaign was not successful. Why? Re-read the first paragraph for the answers.

Perhaps those of us in the SAR who actively recruit and qualify new members would meet with greater success by finding prospective members wherever they are in the world, and then offering to prepare their applications for them at no charge (they pay only the normal application fees and dues). How do we find them?

1. Ask all your chapter members to let you sponsor their kin into the SAR, no matter where they live, and then offer to prepare the applications; all you will need is a photocopy of a birth certificate or two. Ask your members if they are also willing to pay the application fees and first year dues. I prepared the applications for 30 new members that way in 2007.
2. When you are connecting with distant cousins while you are conducting your own ancestry research, ask them if they are interested in joining the SAR, and mention that you will prepare their applications for them. It makes no difference if they are near an established SAR chapter; they can transfer their membership from your chapter to theirs easily after they join.
3. You have an almost limitless supply of new members living in your local area. See my article on "Cracking the Code on Recruiting New Members, Researching Their Ancestry, and Submitting Their Applications" by going to www.alsar.org, scrolling down to the lower right corner of the home page, and click where it says "Click here." I've submitted 35 applications, plus 14 Youth Registrant applications, so far this year (middle of May) by following my own guidelines.

If asked, the sponsor can help in the easy administrative process of changing memberships from one state society to another or from one chapter to another. With almost everyone now having e-mail, it's easy and cheap to stay in touch with our out-lying members. One or more of these "certificate members," planted in a fertile area, may even become active and go on to do great things for the Society.

Time for a war story: In April, I had one prospective member contact me from another state who had been discouraged by the local chapter for numerous reasons. He was told he had to find all his own documentation, and he was advised that the application process was "long and slow, even with perfect documentation, six to twelve months." In thirty days, I had submitted not only his application, but also applications for his son, two grandsons, and nephew. I expect approval for all four in three months. Because he has a very large extended family, he's now interested in starting a SAR chapter in his ancestral county in my state. I've already submitted four distant cousins' applications, and, with the help of my out-of-state contact, I am working on many more. My goal is to have this chapter chartered by February 2009.

Let's do what is necessary to grow our national membership. I'm convinced that the SAR could become as large as our sister organization, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), if we would be willing to encourage our chapters to break out of their molds of recruiting only locally. Since the National Society and State Society benefits from their additional dues, what difference does it make where they live? Once they become members, they may want to start a new chapter, and with our help, they can.